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ABSTRACT

This collection of conference presentation handouts covers various aspects of helping parents of deaf children to become facilitators of conversational skill development. The handouts include: definitions of "pragmatics" and "conversations"; a listing of characteristics of a successful adolescent conversationalist; an illustration and explanation of a conversational speech model (with components of interactive skills, the conversational frame, analysis of context, and communication skills); a discussion guide for parent groups; guides for goal-setting; a list of suggestions for home activities to facilitate conversation; suggestions for conversational topic maintenance and expansion; a self-rating scale to promote conversational self-awareness in adolescents; and a discussion of the value of small talk. (Contains 13 references.) (DB)

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PARENTS AS FACILITATORS OF CONVERSATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT

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Parents as Facilitators of Conversational Skill Development *

Discussion Outline

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B. Conversations: Theoretical and Practical Information
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H. Summary of Ideas

*Round-Table Discussion: Marianne Gustafson & Karen Dobkowski
Alexander Graham Bell Assoc. for the Deaf Convention June 29, 1994

Spoken Language is composed of phonology (sounds), syntax (grammar), semantics (vocabulary) and pragmatics (language use).

Pragmatics is the use of language as a tool to achieve a specific purpose, in a particular social context, with a given partner. Pragmatics involves knowing rules which govern how one chooses words, grammar & topics and adjusts conversational style according to the demands of the situation.

Conversations are a dynamic, interactive form of communication in which two or more people attempt to construct, express and share ideas and information along collaboratively established topics.

Pragmatic, Social and Language Development

Pragmatics (conversational skills) are an important part of language development. Acquisition of increasingly complex grammar and word forms tends to parallel acquisition of conversational skills. As children's language ability increases they enter into conversations with others.This in turn provides opportunities for further language development. It also allows language to become a tool for socialization and a means of enculturation.

Characteristics of good conversationalists:

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-
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Characteristics of A Successful Adolescent Conversationalist

1. Flexible - ability and willingness to adapt conversational behavior for the situation.
2. Assumes and understands cultural differences
3. Strong commitment to see the conversation work
4. Has patience- realizes that time will help to smooth out different conversational styles
5. Relaxed during the conversation
6. Honest and Respectful
7. Upfront with needs and desires
8. Good Interpersonal Skills - friendly, pleasant, considerate
9. Knowledgeable about hearing culture
10. Has a good sense of self (w/strengths and weaknesses)
11. Sensitive to the perspective & interests of others
12. Good ice-breaker skills
13. Has interesting and stimulating information
14. Maintains topics effectively - asks good questions, adds interesting comments, answers effectively
15. Manages talk time well - allows for give-and-take so the conversation is a shared interaction
16. Takes control - initiates topics, directs the topical focus
17. Self-confident

A CONVERSATIONAL SPEECH MODEL

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Marianne Gustafson and Karen Dobkowski/1993

CONVERSATIONAL SPEECH MODEL

A conversational speech model is presented early in the course, Improving Your Conversations, and referred to frequently during the quarter. It supplies students with the concepts and language that they can apply to skill assessment and development. The model defines what a conversation is and reflects the interfacing of the numerous events, skills and attributes that are intrinsic to conversations.

In the center of the model is the Conversational Frame. The frame names a series of events that predictably occur in most conversations. These are: openings, topic initiation, topic maintenance, topic expansion, topic change, and closing. We chose the term 'frame' because we see these events as the outward structure of the conversation. We fit our ideas, pragmatic rules and communication skills into that outward structure.

Surrounding the frame and affecting the quality of the conversation are three components: interactive skills, analysis of context, and communication skills. The model illustrates the interrelationship of the components with each other and the parts of the frame. It helps to dispel the NTID student myth that conversations are successful if one can pronounce long words and say speech sounds correctly.

One of the first components described and practiced is Interactive Skills: attention-getting, turn-taking, clarifying, supplying feedback, using repair strategies, and signalling transitions. These are the mechanisms we use to activate the frame. They are what conversational partners do together in order to move from one event of the frame to another.

The second component is Analysis of Context: intentions, perspective-taking, topic selection, changing styles, new vs. given information and cooperative principles. These are the pragmatic considerations which the participants in the conversation must make. For example, partners must consider who can say what to whom, where, when, how and why?

The third component is Communication Skills. Students must consider what they as individuals bring to the conversation relative to: speech/pronunciation skills, listening/speechreading abilities, English, sign language and nonverbal skills, conceptual network of experiences and ideas, and personality/self-confidence. These skills are the focus of many other courses offerred at NTID and students have the opportunity to use and integrate them in an auditory-oral conversational context in this course. Improving Your Conversations encourages and reinforces the use of skills at each student's maximum potential. The course is thus a supportive followup to speech therapy, pronunciation, speechreading and other communication skill-building courses.

Although the frame and the three components are isolated for teaching purposes, their influence on each other is so strong that it is a somewhat artificial separation. The model is frequently referred to in the course to visually bring the students back to the interrelationships inherent among the various aspects of effective conversational management.

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The Conversational Frame (Parts)

1. Openings: Partners greet each other, generally with routine remarks, such as "Hi, how are you?" "Fine, how are you?" Conversational partners often use small talk for politeness and comfort until the first topic is established.

2. Topic Initiation: One of the conversational partners introduces a topic he/she would like to discuss, based on the purpose or intention of the conversation. If a partner assumes the other person knows a lot about the topic a few words can initiate it. If not, more information may be necessary to clearly establish the topic.

3. Topic Maintenance: Once a topic is initiated conversational partners contribute ideas about it. Comments and questions are used to encourage turn-taking and to develop a topic in-depth. Remarks generally connect to the previous statement.

4. Topic Expansion: Often a conversational partner uses a comment or question that is related to the established topic, but branches off in a different direction. Topic expansion does not always occur. It depends on the intent, situation and partners in the conversation.

5. Topic Change: Sometimes a conversational partner changes the direction of the conversation to a topic that is not related to what is being discussed. A transitional word or phrase is usually used to signal the topic change.

6. Closing: Conversational closings can occur when the intent of the conversation is achieved, when the topic is exhausted or when time runs out. One conversational partner signals with body language or a preclosing statement that he would like to conclude the conversation. The other partner can either introduce a new topic, or agree to close. When both partners are in agreement they use ritual statements to end the conversation.

Interactive Skills

1. Attention-getting: Verbal and nonverbal devices are used to inform a person or group that you want to begin or join in on a conversation. For example, you might raise your voice, tap someone on the shoulder, initiate eye contact or say "Excuse me..."

2. Turn-taking: Partners converse by alternately listening and speaking. The extent to which each person contributes comments and asks questions is often determined by the intent, comfort level and personality of each participant. Each partner has a responsibility to involve the other person and avoid monopolizing a conversation.

3. Feedback: This part of topic maintenance means informing your partner about how well you understand and are interested in what they have to say. Verbal and nonverbal messages such as headnodding, facial expressions, "ok," "uh-huh," and "that's interesting" are often used for feedback.

4. Clarifying: Clarification is a specific type of feedback. It is used when one partner is not sure if they have understood the other person's ideas. Conversationalists must also be skilled at responding to requests for clarification.

5. Repair Strategies: Sometimes in a conversation you realize that you or your partner are not understanding each other. You need to bring the misunderstanding to the other person's attention and then correct the problem. Repair strategies may include repeating or rephrasing part of your message, providing additional information, or changing your rate of speech, vocabulary or grammar.

6. Signalling Transitions: Transitional phrases are used to let your partner know that you are changing to new topic. For example, you might say, "that reminds me..." or "that is like..." or "Remember when..."

Analysis of Context

1. Intentions: The purpose (intention) of the conversation determines what you say and how you say it. You need to know what you are trying to achieve and what effect you want this conversation to have on your partner. Decide if you are requesting, responding, protesting, informing, explaining or chatting.

2. Perspective-Taking: You must understand your partner's point of view and recognize his/her needs and interests. Perspective-taking also involves considering your partner's age, sex, status and your previous interactions with that person.

3. Topic Selection: Conversations will be more effective and interesting if you choose an appropriate topic. Topics should be selected based on intentions, perspective-taking and analysis of time and place of the conversation.

4. Changing Styles: You need to adapt your communication style to each situation and partner. Changing styles affects word choice, grammar, vocal pitch and nonverbal language. For example, you speak differently when talking to friends vs. teachers vs. strangers vs. family vs. children.

5. New vs. Given (Known) Information: New information is anything you say that you think your partner does not know. Given information is anything that you assume your partner already knows. Sometimes you need to check to see what your partner knows about your topic so that you know how much detail to provide. You generally begin a conversation or sentence with given (known) information and then you move to new (unknown) information. This helps your partner focus on what is most important and compare and integrate new information with what he/she already knows.

6. Cooperative Principles (Grice's Maxims): Conversational partners expect each other to say only what is necessary to continue efficient communication. It involves quantity, quality, relation and manner. That means that you provide an appropriate amount of information, that is truthful, relevant, orderly and clear.

Discussion Questions:

1. Describe a successful or satisfying conversation you have had recently with your child. What was the situation? What were you talking about? What made the conversation work?

2. Describe a frustrating or awkward conversation you have experienced with your child. How did you handle it? What might you do differently the next time?

Conversational Experiences-Group Reflections:

A. Successful & Satisfying Experiences

B. Frustrating & Awkward Experiences

C. Strategies

Goals – Be Specific and Realistic

1. You must believe you can reach your goals.
2. You must be able to accomplish your goals in a certain amount of time.
3. You must be able to measure your goals.
4. Your goals must be something you really want to do.
5. You must be able to write strategies to help you achieve your goals.

What Can I Do at Home to Facilitate Conversations?

1. Create a family environment that encourages communication and thinking

2. Capitalize on dinnertime, bedtime and homework time as opportunities to converse

3. Be sure your child always knows who is talking, what the topic is and what is going on

4. Make comments about what your child is doing and pause in anticipation of a response

5. Use questions forms that encourage multiple turns and help to establish a shared topical focus

6. Balance questions with feedback comments and personal sharing

7. Be an enthusiastic listening/speaking partner and model conversational behaviors

8. Become less directive as your child's language skills develop

9. Don't interrupt the flow of the conversation to promote "better speech production"

10. Recognize that there are times and stages of development when your child will be less interested in talking to you

11. Consult your child's teacher(s) for appropriate goals

TOPIC MAINTENANCE & EXPANSION -- The 3 A's

1. ANSWER: Answer your partner's question

2. ADD: Add your own experiences and thoughts about the same topic for topic maintenance

   Add information that about a related topic for topic expansion

3. ASK: Ask the other person a question about the same topic or a related topic

TOPIC MAINTENANCE, EXPANSION & CHANGE

A. TOPIC MAINTENANCE: Comments and questions that keep the conversation going on a particular topic.

1. Types of Comments:
   a. feedback: Ex. Oh, I see; um-hmmm; to let the other person know you are listening and interested
   b. partial repetition of what the other person just said to prompt <u>them</u> to make further comments
   c. statements about <u>your</u> experiences, feelings or thoughts on the topic

2. Types of Questions:
   a. clarifying: to be sure you understood your partner's statements
   b. yes/no and Wh-questions that require a <u>limited</u> response
   c. probing: Ex. how?, why?, would you explain?; and other questions that require an <u>indepth</u> response

B. TOPIC EXPANSION. Comments and questions that branch the conversations into a related topic

1. Types of Comments:
   a. partial repetition of what the other person said, plus <u>new</u> information on a different but <u>similar</u> topic
   b. statements about <u>your</u> experiences, feelings or thoughts on a <u>related</u> topic

2. Types of Questions:
   a. yes/no and Wh-questions about a related topic that require a <u>limited</u> response
   b. probing questions about a related topic : Ex. how?, why?, would you explain?, and others that require an <u>indepth</u> response

C. TOPIC CHANGE: Types of comments and questions are the same as used for topic expansion, except they are about <u>unrelated</u> topics. Sometimes you use a carrier phrase: Ex. By the way, Well...

A Tool for Promoting Self-Awareness in Adolescents

Rate your level of comfort in each of these conversational situations.

1	2	3
very uncomfortable	fairly comfortable	very comfortable

1. "small talk" at a party
2. talking with children
3. talking with elderly people
4. conversations around the dinner table with your family
5. a conversation with a hearing friend
6. conversations with a group of hearing friends
7. conversations at a coffee break or lunch with co-workers
8. a conversation with a boss or supervisor
9. conversations with a stranger or a person you just met
10. conversations with teachers or advisors
11. a conversation in which you decide the topic
12. a conversation in which you share opinions about a topic
13. conversations with person of the opposite sex
14. group conversations at meetings (club, committee, work, etc.)
15. a job interview
16. a conversation about your personal experiences
17. a conversation about things you like to do

II. Review your ratings and answer these questions.

1. What is similar about the conversations that you feel comfortable in?

2. What is similar about the conversations that you feel uncomfortable about?

CONVERSATIONS

Small Talk Introduction

Making *small talk* means talking about topics that are not serious or very important, such as the weather, a movie you saw, how crowded the subway was, or how you got to school that morning.

Why bother with small talk?

1. It helps people to get to know each other.
2. It puts people at ease.
3. It helps start a conversation by providing an introduction.
4. It is an appropriate way to begin a conversation, rather than starting right in on a serious topic.

Small Talk Topics

1. weather (a big snow storm and its related problems; a change in the weather, or a different season; extreme heat or cold)

2. health (exercise, sports, illness, or not feeling well; asking how family members are)

3. travel (car, bus, or subway problems, such as delays; traffic, crowding, rush hour, trips, vacations)

4. work or school (whether or not you like work or school; why you like it, why not; where you go to work or school)

5. entertainment (movies, TV, magazines, books, music; what you like or do not like, and why)

6. food (favorite foods, a good meal or dessert you had recently, favorite restaurants)

7. appearance (comment on clothes, weight loss, new hair style)

Topics to avoid when just starting a conversation include: feelings or emotions, concerns relationships, religion, politics, differing opinions, or any very serious matters.

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